



RAISE THE ROOF



The adventurous Eco-Tourer Off-Highway is a perfect accompaniment to the groundbreaking on-road model.

Reflecting on the last 25 years, there haven't been too many standout innovations when it comes to caravan design. Sure there has been a steady and welcome evolution and the vans today are a far cry from those built in the late 1970s.

But apart from the introduction of the pop-top in the 1970s, the A'van A'liner in the early 1990s and perhaps a few offroaders, there haven't been many leaps in the design of recreational vehicles. However, one that should be added to the list is the Eco-Tourer.

With an extremely low towing profile, low centre of gravity, an easy to use lifting mechanism for the roof and solid insulated walls and ceiling, the Eco-Tourer meets many needs at a time when saving fuel is a favourite topic for caravanners.

The Eco-Tourer was introduced by Caravan Court in Melbourne a couple of years ago and since then has received wide acceptance. Now an Off-Highway model has been added to the range.

CW spotted the Off-Highway unit at the Adelaide Caravan Show in February this year, and decided to take a closer look.

BORN TO BE WILD

The body of the Eco-Tourer is bolted onto a hot dipped galvanised chassis. For additional strength there is a perimeter stainless steel channel that supports the bottom of the walls.

The walls and ceiling consist of 19mm thick high density urethane bonded between 3mm thick fibreglass inside and out.

This construction method offers

superb insulating qualities and sound absorption. We were told that it is similar to the bodies of refrigerated trucks that transport perishable goods.

The Off-Highway model used a 1850kg leaf spring suspension, 1050kg capacity 16in x 7in wheels and Kumho Powerguard LT245/75R16 tyres that can carry a maximum of 1190kg each when inflated to 450kPa.

A spare wheel is recessed neatly into the rear of the van, and there is also a front boot, bumper bar, annexe light and four quick acting corner stabilisers.

There is also an additional roof seal for greater dust protection on unsealed roads, grab handle adjacent to the door to assist entry and exit, checkerplate skirt, heavy duty chassis with a longer tapered drawbar, stainless steel stone deflector frame, galvanised tubular side protection



rails, 12in electric brakes by Dexter USA, Melbourne trailer drums and provision for an additional water tank.

For those who like remote camping there is a deep cycle battery with 15A smart charger as well as a 240V/12V transformer. The 12V lighting system can operate from the battery or via the transformer if plugged in to 240V. Solar panels can be added if desired.

All Eco-Tourers have a fold-up drawbar as standard, which is a boon when there is limited storage space. To raise the drawbar only two bolts have to be undone which takes very little time.

Raising the roof and standing up the side walls at one's destination is child's play. After releasing two hold-down clamps similar to those used on pop-tops, a handle is inserted through

Above: The extra ground clearance will get the Off-Highway into some challenging terrain. **Right top to bottom:** The Eco-Tourer has a low towing profile. The roof is easily raised, is supported by solid walls, and it comes with an awning that is designed to match the van's sloping roof.





Clockwise from bottom left: A roof-mounted flatscreen TV allows more bench space; well designed and practical layout; four-person cafe style dinette; a stainless steel stone shield is mounted in front of a storage bin.



“Eco-Tourer meets many needs at a time when saving fuel is a favourite topic”

drill is much simpler”. This statement probably reflects the thinking that has gone into the design of the Eco-Tourer.

There are all the mod cons that are needed for comfortable holidays but maintenance has been kept to a minimum thanks to some innovative ideas and long lasting materials.

One example is the use of stainless steel in the stone shield frame.

Often it is the little things that impress or detract from the appearance or quality. In the case of the Eco-Tourer CW was most impressed with the attention to detail when it came to installing the pipes, hoses and cables.

I don't think I have ever seen a twin LPG installation that was as neat and intelligently designed as the setup in this caravan.

SIMPLE BUT EFFECTIVE

Not only is the Eco-Tourer aerodynamic, it also has good distribution of weight and is nicely balanced. The centre kitchen, front lounge and rear bedroom design helps in this regard.

Another appealing factor is the lack of choices. You don't have to make decisions about a multitude of equipment and accessory options.

The Eco-Tourer has all the necessities, even an external shower (a model with an internal shower is now also available). Initially the main choice is

whether you prefer a double or two single beds, and if you want the Touring or Off-Highway model.

The decor can be personalised with different materials and colours. Options include rollout awning or annexe, air-conditioning and solar panels to compliment the standard battery system.

All Eco-Tourers have a four-seater cafe style dinette at the front. In between the seats is a folding table that, when folded out of the way, makes it easy to raise the front wall. A storage locker is located behind the right-hand seat.

Additional storage space is available under the seats. In the bedroom there is a wardrobe on both sides of the double bed or in the middle when there are two single beds. Full-width overhead cupboards are moulded in to the roof above the beds.

The kitchen is located between the dinette and the bedroom. On the right-hand side it has the Dometic 90L three-way refrigerator, a stainless steel sink and Cramer cooker with hinged glass tops and a 12V Dometic rangehood above.

Opposite is a large L-shaped bench with a pantry, pot drawer and LG Intellrowave 800W microwave. On each side overhead cupboards are moulded into the roof.

The Eco-Tourer also has a great

We liked

- The concept of the Eco-Tourer
- Neat way that pipes, hoses and cables are attached to the body

We would have liked

- Wooden doors on the cupboards above the bed
- The option of independent suspension (both these items are on the drawing board)

a small opening near the left-hand front corner.

The opening process takes no more effort than lowering a stabiliser leg. Once the sides are in a vertical position, you step inside and lift up the front wall, with its big panoramic window, and lock it in position.

When CW asked Caravan Court's Michael Hawkins if an electric motor had been considered for opening up the van, the answer was “yes, but a cordless electric



quality Pioneer radio/CD player with two ceiling speakers, Galaxy wind-out windows with screens, seven 12V halogen ceiling lights plus two bedside reading lights, fire extinguisher, two towel rails and two Al-Ko roof hatches. A 12V Fan-Tastic roof hatch or Dometic Midi hatch can be fitted in lieu of a standard Al-Ko hatch. Other options fitted to this Eco-Tourer are an external shower with Dometic Truma gas/240V hot water service and the Heron 2.2 air conditioner.

The Heron's compressor and condenser are in the front corner while the air handler is located amidships to provide cool air throughout the interior.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There is no doubt that the Eco-Tourer is a great

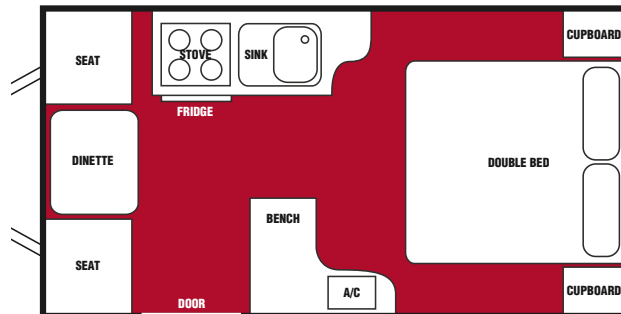
concept. It offers economical towing, you won't be buffeted by passing trucks, it is easy to put up and once inside you are surrounded by solid, well-insulated walls.

With an ATM of 2060kg, the 18ft (5.5m) long Off-Highway Eco-Tourer is no lightweight. However it is hard to imagine that it would be towed by anything other than a 4WD or perhaps a Ford Territory.

Those with a Falcon or Commodore would no doubt opt for the on-road version with the lighter chassis and smaller wheels.

Irrespective which model is chosen, the Eco-Tourer is a welcome addition to the modern range of caravans available today.

For your nearest dealer call Caravan Court on (03) 9546 9822 or visit www.ecotourer.com.au



ECO-TOURER OFF-HIGHWAY

Overall length:	22ft (6.8m)
External length:	16ft 5in (5.1m)
Internal length:	14ft 9in (4.5m)
Width:	7ft 3in (2.2m)
Towing height:	1.7m at front, 2.2m at rear
Tare mass:	1680kg (from 1350kg for basic on-road)
Gross trailer mass:	1850kg
Aggregate trailer mass:	2060kg
Ball mass:	160kg unladen
Axle group capacity:	1850kg
Chassis construction:	Hot dipped galvanised
Suspension:	Leaf spring
Hubs:	Six-stud 1850kg capacity
Brakes:	12in Electric Dexter USA
Wheels:	16in x 7in JJ
Wall construction:	Fibreglass and urethane
Water tank:	80L
Flooring:	12mm water resistant ply
Window type:	Galaxy wind-out
Stove:	Cramer three-burner
Refrigerator:	Dometic RM 2350
	90L three-way
Microwave:	LG Intellwave 800W
Lighting:	12V halogen
Spare wheel:	1 on rear bumper bar
LPG:	2 x 4.5kg
Price:	\$42,100 (standard) \$49,090 (with extras)

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